

## Are Christians Domineering or Doormats?

If ever there were a place where there should be peace, it should be your church. If ever there were a place where you would find people who know you, appreciate you and treat you well, it should be your congregation. But, what if it isn't? What if it's a place where people *don't* get along? In the opening words of James, chapter 2, James writes these words about the members of his own congregation: *"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism. Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, 'Here's a good seat for you,' but say to the poor man, 'You stand there' or 'Sit on the floor by my feet,'" (James 2:1-4 NIV)*

James accuses them of discrimination. And he even shows us what it looked like. A rich man comes in and some of the members say to him "good, you sit here." And then a poor, even dirty man comes into the church. And they say to him: "You *stand* there in the corner" or "You *sit* here on the ground by my feet."

We look at this picture and we say to ourselves: What give them the right? What gives them the right to be domineering bullies? But, we could very well ask ourselves the same question. What gives you the right? Some of the most domineering bullies out there are Christians. And you can tell them by what they say. They use phrases like this: "This is what you're *gonna* do." Where's the discussion? Where's the looking at the issue in light of God's word? No, *This is what you're gonna do*. Or maybe you've heard that phrase "yeah, but..." So, you speak to a fellow member and you say, "This is what God's word says." And their response is "Yeah, but..." What they are saying is "I know that God's word is clear in this issue, but I'm now going to start bullying you."

Now, if you've heard words like these from your own lips, or from the lips of your fellow Christians, what is the proper response? What does James say to his fellow Christians: *"have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:4 NIV)* What was James' response? He told them that they were sinning. They were evil judges. So also, God's word says the same thing to you and me. When we discriminate, when we bully, when we are domineering, we are sinning.

But notice where James goes from there. Yes, he brings out the problem. But he also speaks about the solution. Why are people—even Christians bullies? Very often it's because they need control. They need a safe, manageable kingdom to rule. Notice how James doesn't just address the problem. He also addresses *why* the problem is there and what the solution is: *"Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?" (James 2:5 NIV)*

James is telling them 'there is no need to bully, domineer and carve out a kingdom for yourself.' Why? Because they had a kingdom. Even though they were worth nothing to the world, they were worth everything to our Father above. And he showed it by choosing them to be *rich*. Oh, in what way were they rich? They were heirs not of banks or land or stocks and bonds—no, they were heirs of God's kingdom. And he *promised* that to them. And this is yours by faith—not the choice you made, but the gift of trust he gave to you so that you know Jesus and all he has done for you.

And this morning James says the same to you: 'there is no need to bully, domineer and carve out a kingdom for yourself.' Why? Because you have a kingdom. He chose you even though you are worth nothing to the world. He chose you by faith, as a free gift. He chose you to be rich, not necessarily with stocks and bonds, but with God's kingdom. What is God's kingdom? It's Jesus delivering us from sin, death and the devil. And how do we know all of this is true? How do we know we don't need to push, bully and domineer anymore? Because he promised all this to us.

What a beautiful sermon for James to preach and for us to hear. We don't need to be domineering bullies because we have the kingdom. We have deliverance from sin. But James isn't done yet. He says to his congregation: *"But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? Are they not the ones who are slandering the noble name of him to whom you belong?" (James 2:6-7 NIV)*

James speaks to these dear ones whom he loves as a pastor and his heart is in pain over them. They discriminate and domineer and bully. They give the best places of honor to the rich people. And here's the *huge* irony: these

are the very same ones who are bullying *them*. And just look at how evil these rich people were: They exploited these Christians and they dragged them into court. If someone exploited you and sued you for no reason, what would you do? Would you make others stand in corners so that these evil people might sit in the best places? NO.

So, these rich people sued these Christians. But, they did something even worse. They blasphemed Jesus. Literally, these words read: *"Aren't they the ones who are blaspheming the beautiful name which was called over you?"*<sup>1</sup> So, the first question we ask is this: what is the 'name that is called over' someone? When is it that God's name is spoken *over* you and placed *on* you? Most likely, here James is referring to Baptism. These rich people were making fun of their baptisms and their Savior, Jesus. And instead of defending God's word and their Savior, what did they do? They pushed the poor to the side and gave these bullies the best seats.

Do you see the point that James is making? Being Domineering is a sin. But so is being a doormat. Just as people blasphemed the name that was called over them, so also do people blaspheme the name that is called over us. It is a sin when people blaspheme our baptisms and then expect us to worship with them.

My brothers and sisters, do you realize that in 2007, Pope Benedict declared that all the sacraments performed in non-Roman Catholic churches are invalid<sup>2</sup>. The Catholic church publicly says that your baptism isn't valid—that it didn't really happen. And yet, when they invite you to pray with them and you say 'no', they make you feel so much guilt and shame.

So also with evangelical churches, the same is true. Do you realize that most evangelicals say that your baptism is invalid because you were baptized when you were a tiny child. They blaspheme the name that was called over you in your baptism and *then* they make you feel guilty that they can't come to the Lord's Supper with you in this church.

Just as it's a sin to be Domineering, it's also a sin to be a Doormat. And yet, time and time again, I hear of Christians—yes even in this congregation—who will rejoice in the name that was called over them in their baptisms and then they will go and worship with friends or relatives who blaspheme what Jesus gave you in your baptisms. Instead of speaking out against their blasphemy they worship with him. Again, it's a sin to be Domineering. But it's just as much a sin to not stand up for what is true, good and right. It's just as much a sin to be a Doormat.

As we travel back to these words here in James, notice how James deals with the Christian Doormats in his congregation: *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"* (James 2:12–13 NIV)

Mercy triumphs over judgment! No doubt, these Christians felt doubly judged and condemned. They were guilty of being domineering. They were guilty of being doormats. Where could they go with all of their sin? They went to their Father in heaven, clinging to, trusting in his mercy. They rejoiced that the forgiveness that God offered and gave to them in their baptism is still theirs. They still have the kingdom. They are still delivered from sin, death and the Devil. And today, as we see that we are doubly condemned for being Domineering and Doormats, we go to the same place. We cling to and trust in God's mercy. We rejoice that when that pastor so many years ago spoke the name of the Triune God over us, he offered and gave to us the forgiveness of sins.

So then, by brothers and sisters, are Christians Domineering or are they Doormats? We are neither. We are Delivered. Now live as one whom Jesus has delivered from sin, death and the devil. Let yourself be humbled that God may lift you up. And be bold and courageous and fighting for and defending all the gifts God has given to you. Amen.

<sup>1</sup>ἐν αὐτοῖς βλασφημῶσιν τὸ καλὸν ὄνομα τὸ ἐπικληθεὲν ἐφ' ὑμᾶς;

<sup>2</sup>MSNBC: msnbc.com news services, Tues., July 10, 2007: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/19692094>